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ABSTRACT

This document reports on a study undertaken to compare the academic achievement of athletes, identified as members of University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) intercollegiate teams, with that of male students not engaged in intercollegiate sports. Academic achievement was measured by the cumulative grade-point average (GPA) for spring quarter, 1973. In addition, an analysis of persistence to graduation was undertaken for similar groups of freshmen athletes and for a sample of male students for the years 1965 and 1968. Results indicated the mean GPA for male athletes for the spring quarter, 1973 was slightly less than the mean GPA for male undergraduates for the entire university and for each college except Agriculture, where the athletes involved had a slightly higher average. Also the average ACT Composite score for male athletes was slightly less than for that of all male entering freshmen in each of the years 1968 through 1972. For the 1965 male student sample in this study, the rate of persistence to graduation was 51 percent, with 4 percent still in school; the rate for the 1968 sample was 40 percent with 14 percent still enrolled. The educational progress of these small groups of students indicates that the 4-year time span to receive a bachelor's degree or its equivalent is perhaps not the best indication of persistence for either the athlete or any other male undergraduate. (MJM)

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A STUDY OF THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF ATHLETES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE

by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE / Knoxville, Tennessee 37916

A Study of the Academic Achievement of Athletes at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Concern has been expressed regarding the academic achievement of athletes at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK). In response to this query, a study was undertaken to compare the academic achievement of athletes, identified as members of UTK intercollegiate teams, with that of male students not engaged in intercollegiate sports. Academic achievement was measured by the cumulative grade point average (GPA) for Spring Quarter, 1973. In addition, an analysis of persistence to graduation was undertaken for similar groups of freshman athletes and for a sample of male students for the years 1965 and 1968.

Related Research

Iffert (1957), Knoell (1964), and Summerskill (1962) have reported similar figures on persistence to graduation for institutions of higher learning: Less than 40 percent of the students entering higher educational institutions were graduated from those same institutions four years later. A total of 51 per cent were graduated from their first or some other institution in four years. Eventually, 60 per cent were graduated.

Knoell (1964) stated that the average attrition rate had been stable for 40 years but would vary according to types of colleges. Summerskill (1962) found that the attrition rate at publicly supported institutions was higher than at privately supported schools.

Eckland (1964) traced the academic careers of all male students who entered The University of Illinois as freshmen in 1952. Four out of 10 were graduated from that institution four years later, one in 10 was graduated

elsewhere four years later, and five out of 10 dropped out. However, two of those five later returned to school and were graduated.

More recent literature has revealed a higher persistence rate, although it should be kept in mind that this literature involves only a very few institutions. Johannson and Rossman (1973) replicated a five-year longitudinal study at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota. They found that 57 percent of the freshmen starting in 1964 and 59 percent of those starting in 1965 were graduated from that institution four years later. Within five years 60 per cent of the 1964 and 63 per cent of the 1965 entering classes were graduated. About two per cent were still enrolled in each case.

Max (1969) determined the graduation rate for those students that entered Queens, Brooklyn, City, and Hunter Colleges in New York in the Fall of 1960: 48 per cent were graduated within four years from the college where they entered, and 71 per cent were graduated within seven years.

A study at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (Larsen, 1970) revealed that of the entering freshman class of Fall 1960, 33 per cent were graduated from UTK four years later, 37 per cent were graduated from some institution four years later, and 68 per cent were graduated from some institution by 1970. In another study using UTK data (Roney, 1970) it was found that in 1969 the survival rate was 53 per cent. The survival rate was based upon the number of freshmen registered in the Spring Quarter and the number of sophomores, exclusive of new transfer students, registered in the following Fall Quarter.

Subjects

The list of students identified as athletes (participants in intercollegiate sports) was provided by the Department of Athletics, UTK, for 1965,

1968, and 1973. Each individual was also identified by the sport(s) in which he participated.

Male undergraduate student GPA information for each of the colleges as well as for the total population were obtained from the Office of Student Information, UTK. These data, of course, included the athletes as well as the other male students.

Individual American College Testing (ACT) scores were obtained from the ACT Student Profile Sheet provided to the institution for advising purposes. The composite ACT score is the average score for the four areas tested (English, mathematics, social studies, and natural science). The average ACT score for male undergraduates was obtained from The ACT Class Profile Service Reports for the years 1967 through 1972, which included the freshman entry years for the listed athletes. However, these ACT scores were not available for transfers.

For the portion of the study dealing with persistence to graduation, a random sample of entering freshman male students, exclusive of identified athletes, was taken from a list of new students for Fall Quarter of each of the years 1965 and 1968.

Analysis of Data

Mean GPA's were determined for the athletes and for other male undergraduate students by college and on an overall basis (Table I). Mean GPA's were also found for the participants in each sport (Table II).

A comparison was made between the average ACT composite score for the presently enrolled male athletes and for average males entering as freshmen at UTK in the same years, 1968 through 1972 (Table III).

For the two groups of entering freshman students in 1965 and 1968, athletes and a sample of male undergraduate students, the status toward

graduation or obtaining the bachelor's degree or its equivalent was determined (Table IV).

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Results

The mean GPA for male athletes for the Spring Quarter, 1973 was slightly less than the mean GPA for male undergraduates for the entire university and for each college except Agriculture, where the athletes involved had a slightly higher average. Also, the average ACT Composite score for male athletes was slightly less than that for all male entering freshmen in each of the years 1968 through 1972.

With regard to the average GPA by sport, tennis held the highest (2.81) and basketball the lowest (2.16) average.

For the 1965 male student sample in this study, the rate for persistence to graduation was 51 percent, with four percent (N = 3) still in school; the rate for the 1968 sample was 40 percent with 14 percent (N = 9) still enrolled. Football and golf freshmen entering in 1965 and track freshmen entering in 1968 had a graduation rate greater than that of the sample of the university. The rate of graduation for entering freshmen in football for 1968 could also exceed the university rate within a short period. Thirty-one percent have already been graduated and 31 percent are still enrolled.

The educational progress of these small groups of students indicates that the four-year time span to receive a bachelor's degree or its equivalent is perhaps not the best indication of persistence for either the athlete or any other male undergraduate.

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Table I

Mean Grade Point Average by College for Male Athletes and Male Undergraduate Students
Spring Quarter, 1973

College	Male Athletes N	Male Athletes Mean GPA	Male Undergraduate Students N	Male Undergraduate Students Mean GPA
Agriculture	6	2.89	717	2.73
Architecture	3	2.29	364	2.54
Business Administration	143	2.42	3,021	2.46
Communications	9	2.43	322	2.47
Education	73	2.22	887	2.59
Engineering	20	2.47	1,426	2.68
Home Economics	1	1.96	11	2.09
Liberal Arts	63	2.46	3,375	2.63
Total	318	2.38	10,237	2.58

Source: Office of Institutional Research.

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Table II

Mean Grade Point Averages by
Intercollegiate Sport for Male Athletes
Spring Quarter, 1973

	N[a]	Mean GPA
All male undergraduate students	10,237	2.58
All male athletes	313	2.38
Baseball	43 (3)	2.50
Basketball	23 (1)	2.16
Football (freshman squad)	57	2.24
Football (varsity squad)	76 (4)	2.28
Golf	15	2.20
Swimming	31	2.48
Tennis	9	2.81
Track	53 (2)	2.27
Wrestlers	11	2.68

[a]The number in parentheses are also counted in another sport.

Source: Office of Institutional Research.

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Table III

Mean ACT Composite Score of Male Athletes Compared to the Mean ACT Composite Score for All Male Freshmen Entering the Same Year

Entry Year	Male Athletes[a] N	Male Athletes[a] Mean ACT	Male Undergraduates N	Male Undergraduates Mean ACT
1972	89	21.5	1,700	22.7
1971	72	22.2	1,970	23.1
1970	55	19.7	1,995	23.1
1969	49	22.2	2,181	22.8
1968	12	19.8	2,075	22.5

[a]ACT scores were not available for those athletes who were transfer students.

Source: The American College Testing Program Class Profile Service Reports, 1968-1972 and the Office of Institutional Research.

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Table IV

First-Time Freshmen Enrolled in 1965 and 1968 Which Have Been Graduated[a] from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville by Spring Quarter 1973

	1965				1968			
	Freshman	Still in School	Graduated		Freshmen	Still in School	Graduated	
	N	N	N	%	N	N	N	%
Athletes								
Football	38		21	55	35	11	11	31
Basketball	3		1	33	6		0	0
Track	17	1	6	35	9	1	6	67
Baseball	5		1	20	3	1	1	33
Golf	8	1	5	63	3		0	0
Tennis	2		1	50	1		0	0
Swimming					7	3	0	0
Total Athletes	73	2	35	48	64	16	18	28
Male Student Sample	79	3	40	51	65	9	26	40

[a]Graduation was determined by the receipt of a bachelor's degree or its equivalent.

Source: Office of Institutional Research.

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